DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 542 HE 029 196

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TITLE Generating More Light Than Heat: A Departmental Approach to Performance Assessment.
PUB DATE 23 Mar 96
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Elementary School Teachers; *Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; Performance Factors; Program Development; *Student Teacher Evaluation; *Student Teachers; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS North Central Bible College MN

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of an assessment method for elementary education students at North Central Bible College. The context in which performance assessment was introduced is discussed, and groundwork and planning of the assessment strategy, involving the education department as a whole, is described. The process of defining the essential knowledge, skills and dispositions of beginning elementary teachers is covered, and nine general instructional outcomes are presented. The evaluation, selection and definition of performance assessment methods is also described. An assessment design outline resulting from this evaluation is presented, which includes performance criteria, performance process, performance judgment, and performance feedback. Guidelines for writing assessments for students based on each section are provided. Workshops on performance assessment were conducted for faculty as a part of operationalizing the assessment project, and a program of workshops is listed. Preliminary outcomes of the partially implemented program of written assessments are presented, including outcomes for teachers and students. (JPB)

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Generating More Light than Heat: A Departmental Approach to Performance Assessment

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The Education Department at North Central Bible College is committed to the idea that quality student assessment generates more light than heat, that light (understanding) being for the student, the instructor, and those making curricular decisions within the college. The Education Department search for quality assessment methods began in the fall of 1994. The impetus for the search was twofold. First, we felt that traditional assessment methods (multiple choice, short answer, true-false, and matching items) were not capable of adequately measuring the type of learning we considered crucial for the effective functioning of teachers in a rapidly changing world. Second, the Minnesota State Department of Education issued a ruling that each teacher education institution within the state must have an assessment plan in place by 1996.

Within this paper, the following issues will be addressed: the context in which performance assessment was introduced, writing of learner outcomes, defining performance assessment, writing the actual performance assessments, and finally, preliminary thoughts about the overall effectiveness of the assessment plan.

Institutional and Departmental Overview

North Central Bible College (NCBC) is a coeducational, undergraduate institution with a strong liberal arts core. NCBC is a primarily residential college located in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota with an enrollment of 1041 students. NCBC is owned and operated by 11 Assemblies of God districts in the upper midwest. North Central offers a B.A. and B.S. degree in 22 different majors as well as several diploma, certificate, and associate programs. Seventy-five percent of the North Central's graduates are presently in church vocational positions in the United States and around the world. The Teacher Licensure Program, as developed by the Education Department, was approved by the Minnesota State Board of Teaching in 1987. Ninety-seven students are currently classified as elementary education majors. Those students are preparing for (K-6) teaching positions in Christian, public and private schools. The department chair, four full-time, one half-time, and two part-time faculty prepare students within the major.

Laying the Groundwork (Writing Learner Outcomes)

Before any assessment design work was initiated, the department focused on defining the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions of beginning elementary teachers. This one-year initiative was led by the department chair with ongoing feedback from the department faculty and an External Affairs Committee comprised of educators from within and outside the college. A total of 52 specific learner outcomes were agreed upon by all constituents in the process. The nine general instructional outcomes were:

- Demonstrates a strong foundation in general/liberal studies content knowledge.
- Demonstrates a knowledge of the historical, philosophical and sociological foundations of education along with its political aspects.
- Demonstrates a working knowledge of the dynamics and principles of human growth and development.

- Applies the research based theories and practice that validate teaching-learning strategies, curriculum development, and other educational practices.
- Demonstrates appropriate leadership within the classroom and/or school setting that models respect for individual differences.
- Analyzes issues concerning education and the professional educator.
- Formulates classroom management strategies that aid in the development of self-esteem and self-control by the student.
- Formulates a world view based on Christian principles, inclusive of knowledge, skills and dispositions; and then translates it into appropriate and effective teaching behaviors.
- Demonstrates a value system supportive of others.

Laying More Groundwork (Defining Performance Assessment)

Once the learner outcomes were established, the search for quality methods of assessment began. A faculty member from within the department was given one-fourth release time to investigate assessment options, create or adapt an appropriate assessment model, provide in-service education for departmental colleagues, and provide feedback on the design of actual assessments. This individual was known as the Performance Assessment Facilitator.

During the initial investigation of assessment methods, four forms of assessment appeared as options for evaluating student success in meeting the established learner outcomes--traditional assessment, performance assessment, authentic assessment, and alternative assessment. The first option, traditional assessment, was dismissed by the Department of Education faculty because of concerns about the limited value of this method in assessing the established outcomes. Coming to conceptual clarity about the meaning of the three other assessment methods (performance assessment, authentic assessment, and alternative assessment) was not an easy task. While there is limited consensus regarding these terms, Meyer (1992) and Worthen (1993) offered valuable insights from which the following definitions were constructed.

> Performance assessment focuses on students' processes, products, or performances as they engage in specific behaviors on significant tasks. That behavior is then assessed according to a set of pre-determined criteria. The context may or may not be a real-life context.
>
> Authentic assessment focuses on students' processes, products, or performances as they engage in specific behaviors on significant tasks. That behavior is then assessed according to a set of pre-determined criteria. The context is similar to that encountered in real-life.
>
> Note: Authenticity is considered multidimensional. Facets of authenticity include: stimuli, task complexity, locus of control, motivation, spontaneity, resources, conditions, criteria, standards, and consequences. Some assessments are more authentic than others. Educators must be explicit about which facets of authenticity are the most critical.
>
> Alternative assessment includes either performance or authentic assessment.

The performance assessment option was selected by the Department of Education as the model which would best assess our particular set of learner outcomes. Additional rationale for this selection included the following: (a) a belief that not everything the department does will or should be completely authentic (although the continual focus will be on authenticity), (b) in terms of feasibility of the task, the department did not wish to incur the extra work of specifying how each assessment was authentic or inauthentic, and (c) performance assessment seems to be the most commonly used and best understood of the three terms.

Once the performance assessment option was agreed upon, the next task was to develop an assessment design model that would serve as a base of understanding for all of the department members. The text Student Assessment-as-Learning at Alverno College (1994) was particularly helpful in the design work. Based on a reading of this text, consultation with members of

Alverno's Assessment Council, and extensive research, the following model was created by the Performance Assessment Department Facilitator.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN OUTLINE

Outcome:

Purpose

To provide direction for instruction, provide guidelines for assessment, and to convey instructional intent to others.

Writing Guidelines

- states in terms of what is expected from the learner
- states in terms that are observable
- measures only one intended outcome

Performance Criteria:
(observable indicators of success)

Purpose

To refine faculty expectations of student performance, develop student understanding of required performance, and to establish a shared basis of understanding for judgment purposes.

Writing Guidelines

- relates directly to the distinguishing essentials of a given instructional outcome
- states in observable terms
- allows for student creativity in meeting criteria
- utilizes an appropriate degree of specificity (greater specificity is used when students are at a lower developmental level)
- supports quality self-assessment by the student
- supports quality assessment by the instructor and other judges

Performance Process:
(what students will do)

Purpose

Requiring new information to be utilized deeply and elaborately will dramatically increases chances of successful encoding and retrieval of information from long-term memory.

Writing Guidelines

- provides an opportunity to realize all generic criteria related to a given outcome
- provides an opportunity to develop specific criteria related to a given outcome
- recognizes the developmental level of the learner
- utilizes the most realistic purpose and audience possible
- includes enough information for the learner to understand the context and complete the process without further information being provided by the instructor

Performance Judgment:
(how the process will be judged and by whom)

Purpose

Performance Judgment serves as the basis from which Performance Feedback is provided. Performance Judgment involves the creation of a meaningful profile of how well the learner has met the generic and specific criteria outlined in the Performance Criteria.

Writing Guidelines

- defines who will make the judgment
- defines how the judgment will be made
- utilizes Performance Criteria in the valuing process
- focuses on strengths and weaknesses but is generally positive in nature
- provides an inside (self-assessment) and outside perspective
- specifies explicit steps for improvement
- provides timely information that is reinforcing as well as developmental in nature

Performance Feedback:
(how feedback will be provided)

Purpose

Performance Feedback is a component of the overall assessment process which focus on reflection and growth. Performance Feedback involves the communication of the meaningful profile developed in the Performance Judgment. The Performance Feedback time is a teachable moment that should serve to reinforce what the learner knows and to motivate further development.

Writing Guidelines

- expands the picture of a student's own ability
- defines how the profile developed in the Performance Judgment will be communicated
- demonstrates sensitivity to students' emotional well-being
- allows for two-way communication.

The model described above has the following characteristics:

a. clearly defined outcomes based, in part, on the Minnesota Graduation Rule;
b. judgments based on explicit criteria (criteria specifically metered to student development level);
c. a context with a realistic purpose and audience;
d. opportunity to integrate knowledge and ability from discrete courses;
e. multidimensional sampling (multiple and varied);
f. ongoing internal and external assessment; and
g. feedback administered sequentially.

Laying Even More Groundwork (Operationalizing Performance Assessment)

Before the process of constructing the actual performance assessments could begin, all members of the department were asked to consider their current course offerings with respect to the newly established learner outcomes. After several department meetings, a general consensus was reached concerning which outcomes would be allotted to each course offering. Some course re-configuration resulted from this discussion. Although some traditional assessment remained in place, it was agreed that each of the 52 outcomes would be assessed through performance assessments created by the instructor responsible for the course instruction. Many outcomes, in fact, were assessed in multiple courses.

The next step was for the Performance Assessment Facilitator to begin the process of educating department colleagues about how to construct performance assessments. It was determined that a one or two hour (per month) workshop format would be utilized to provide in-service training. Several faculty members from outside the department also participated in workshops (they constructed assessments for outcomes related to their course offerings). The following workshop format was followed from November of 1994 until May of 1995.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT WORKSHOPS

Date	Topic
Nov. 16	• Explanation of overall design process. Consider outcomes.
Jan. 18	• Mini-lesson on writing performance criteria. • Group writing of selected performance criteria.
Feb. 1	• Review the writing of performance criteria. • Partner writing of performance criteria.
Feb. 15	• Due: Criteria for 1/2 of outcomes (written by individual -- assisted by facilitator). • Critique of outcome criteria.

- Mini-lesson on writing performance process.
- Group writing of performance process.

March 1
- Review of writing performance process.
- Partner writing of performance process.

March 22
- Due: Performance process for 1/2 of outcomes (written by individual -- assisted by facilitator).
- Critique of performance process.
- Mini-lesson on writing performance judgment and performance feedback.
- Group writing of performance judgment and feedback.

April 12
- Due: Performance judgment and feedback for 1/2 of outcomes (written by individual -- assisted by facilitator).
- Critique of judgment and feedback.
- Self and group evaluation of completed assessments.

May 3
- Due: Criteria, performance process, performance judgment, and feedback for second 1/2 of outcomes (written by individual - - assisted by facilitator).
- Self and group evaluation of completed assessments.
- Re-evaluate course design considering newly created assessments.

Unfortunately, not all performance assessments were completed by May 3. A number of departmental faculty members worked on the assessments during the summer and fall of 1995. The assessments were completed in January of 1996.

Assessing the Move to Performance Assessment

As of January 1996, the performance assessments developed during the previous 14 months have been partially implemented. Full implementation is scheduled for the fall semester of 1996.

While it is certainly premature to assess the effectiveness of performance assessment in measuring the student attainment of the 52 learner outcomes, the five initial observations that follow may be of interest.

1. The process of writing learner outcomes was an essential preliminary step prior to writing performance assessments. The actual act of defining the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions for beginning teachers allowed department members to reach common consensus about future goals in teacher preparation. Additionally, by having the learner outcomes established, department members were able make large and small scale curriculum revision by determining areas of curriculum gap or unnecessary overlap.
2. Extended department in-service education about the design of performance assessments was a key part of the process. Continued support and feedback were provided to department members by the Performance Assessment Department Facilitator throughout the 14 months of writing the assessments. The fact that each department member wrote and will implement his/her own performance assessments is also a key factor.
3. Writing performance assessments is a very time consuming task. Members of the department would have felt less pressure if the college had been able to provide limited release time for the writing task.
4. Even though all department members saw value in the construction of performance assessments, there were some reservations about the time investment in creating the assessments and the restrictions placed on more "intuitive" instructors by the adopted model. These two areas of concern may have been resolved through the use of an assessment plan that incorporated equal portions of traditional and performance assessment.

5. Students initially seem to be pleased with the structure of the assessments. Comments generally relate to the fact that "they know what's being expected of them" and they know "what's important in the grading." They also seem pleased that their final course grade is based on a number of assessments, not merely on a mid-term and final exam score. They do comment about the "heavy" work load of elementary education courses, however.

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